

Who is afraid of free discussion ?

Only the Man
who is not on the side of Truth.



Mr. Nani Palkhiwala's most persuasive and powerful
advocacy for Zoroaster and his Religion —

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hope he can bring the stray lambs back to the fold.



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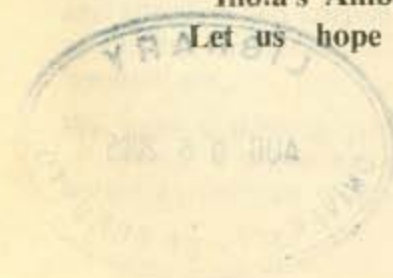
EXCHANGE OF GIFTS



**Silver Casket from the Chairman of the Parsi Punchayet, Bombay
and**

**Golden Advice from H. E. Nani Palkhiwala,
India's Ambassador to Washington**

Let us hope each will cherish his gift.





The speech made by Mr. Nani Palkhiwala at the Reception given to him by the Trustees of the Parsi Punchayet was taperecorded. At our request, Mr. Nani A. Palkhiwala has sent to us a transcript of his tape-recorded speech. We are re-producing hereunder the complete transcript of his tape-recorded speech.

Never before in the annals of the Parsis, had such a universally acclaimed learned, eloquent, sincere and esteemed Parsi made such a powerful speech. The points made by him were driven home with cogent arguments, unanswerable facts. Only the purblind will fail to agree with him. We, however, leave it to our enlightened readers to judge.

We trust the Trustees will act in the spirit in which Mr. Nani A. Palkhiwala has advised the Members of the Community to act, give no support to outdated customs which to-day prevail over the true spirit of the Zoroastrian religion and take a lead in the matter. Ed.)

Mr. Boman Behram and other Trustees of the Parsi Punchayet
Ladies and Gentlemen :

I am not only overwhelmed by your kindness, your warmth and your affection, but also physically overwhelmed by the flowers which you have been so kind as to bring for me this morning. Quite honestly, I did not know that so much would be done by different Associations; otherwise I would have suggested that I might accept one flower from each, and perhaps we could have done something else with the money available. Anyway, it looks very ungracious that after having received these tokens of your warmth and affection I should have something of this sort to say.

I cannot thank the Trustees enough for their over-generous words in the Address that they have been kind enough to present to me and for the very beautiful casket in which it has been enclosed. I shall keep this with great pride and affection and cherish it as a memento of the deep regard which it has been enclosed. I shall keep this with great pride and affection and cherish it as a memento of the deep regard which the community is kind and generous enough to show towards me.

We have a debt to pay to India

Today I speak before you, an audience which is a definable percentage of the total community. It must be I think

about 1,200, and if we are 61,000 Parsis in Bombay, it would be about 1/60 of the entire community here. I find it deeply touching; and you will understand and forgive me if I like to talk, not about myself, but about you, my friends, my co-religionists, whose welfare and whose future are uppermost in my mind. Men like me come and go and may perhaps be remembered for a while, but it is just one brief hour upon the stage and the man is heard of no more. But this great religion which the few of us have been able to preserve for so many centuries, will survive; and in centuries and generations to come we shall have to throw up people who will be able to do their little bit for the country to which they have the honour to belong.

I had felt when I was a young boy, and the belief has got confirmed as I have grown older—that we Parsis, perhaps the most minute community in the world which is of any significance at all, have to do something to repay the debt which we owe to this country which gave us shelter 1300 years ago. There is the law of Karma which ordains the destinies of individuals. I believe that it also ordains the destinies of communities and of nations. There is the Karmic return which has to be made by our community; because, but for the tolerance of the people who were here and but for the welcome which they gave us, perhaps the religion itself may not have survived, except in Iran where the number of our co-religionists is so small. And if, in repaying that debt for a favour done to our ancestors more than 1300 years ago, I can play a tiny, even insignificant part, I shall regard my life as having been well spent.

Crust mistaken for Kernel

I believe in all religions. I believe that every religion has something to teach mankind. But I must confess that if I have to choose a religion purely as a matter of my own rational thinking I would choose Zoroastrianism.

I have never yet addressed a meeting of my co-religionists; and I think it would be wrong for me, having a captive audience like this, to inflict on you my own views on many of the controversies that are raging today in the community.

But I would just like to say a few words for your consideration. You may agree with me or you may not agree with me; but I have a few thoughts which I do feel sincerely I should place before you for your quiet consideration. And I do it because, I repeat, I am not thinking today of my own future but of **the future of yourselves, your children and the generations to come** who will be born of the people who are today present in this hall.

The world is changing very fast, and you will find that as the world progresses, every religion, every creed, every belief, gets encrusted over a period of time, and **sometimes the crust is mistaken for kernel**—sometimes it does not happen, sometimes it does. And that is the reason why one has to be very careful to see what the essence of Zoroastrianism is. I have in my humble way tried to study it. I do not know Avesta myself, but I have read translations by perceptive people who have had the vision to understand what really the Prophet meant.

Freedom of Choice in our Religion

It is just incredible what Zoroaster knew intuitively centuries ago, whichever was the millennium in which he was born. (As you know, there is a wide divergence of opinion as to the particular century in which he lived). His intuitive insight was so great that what he perceived and what he understood is today proved by science to be totally right. Beyond question, **he was divinely inspired. The message he gave was so simple and his tolerance was so profound! Even purely as a thinker and as a poet he must be regarded as among the greatest.** Here is the Prophet who came 3,000 years ago to teach the world. And yet **he does not say, "Accept what I am telling you."** His exact words, translated into English by Dr. Dinshah Irani, were: **"Let each man choose his creed with that freedom of choice which each must have at great events."** what a beautiful thought and what a humble thing for a divinely inspired man to say. One of the great events in your life is when you choose your religion, unless you choose to follow the religion which you inherit. And the Prophet said—**I give you freedom of choice; you are not bound to follow me; ponder over what I say; if it appeals to you, accept it, otherwise don't.**

Spirit of Tolerance Essential

I do feel that the spirit in which the whole religion of Zoroaster was conceived needs to be revived and revived today the spirit of tolerance, the spirit which permits another person to differ from me and which gives me no right to say that I am the sole depository of all wisdom. This was the great attribute of our Prophet. In fact, it is not everyone who has spoken like that. Very few prophets have spoken in such tones. And as you read what he has to say, his whole emphasis is on as everyone of us knows, as every Parsi child knows, — on **Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good deeds.** ... This is Zoroastrianism in its essence. The way to salvation which he showed was **not by any particular ritual or by any particular ceremony, but by the way you live your life.** In other words, in Zoroastrianism there is no salvation on the cheap. No one can, either by paying someone else to pray or by having something done, find his way to peace after death. **It is only your action which decides what ultimately is in store for you.**

Parsi Customs and analogy, of Czarina's Rose

These thoughts I would like to bring to the surface of our mind, because I do feel that sometimes perhaps we over-emphasize certain aspects which are not of the essence of true Zoroastrianism. One great thinker said about Christ and Christianity that there was only one true Christian and he died on the cross. Let not be said that there was only one true Zoroastrian and he died when Zoroaster was killed. People are so prone to forget what the real essence is. Let me give you one example of how some customs continue to outlive the purpose for which they originally came into existence. When Bismark, the German Chancellor, went on a visit to Russia, he found a soldier standing with a gun at a particular spot. There was nothing to guard there, and Bismark was wondering why that soldier was wasting his time standing there. He made enquiries and he found that 75 years earlier there was on that spot a rose plant which was the favourite of the then Czar of Russia and he had kept the soldier there to guard it. The plant died within a few years but the soldier continued on duty.

Give up Intolerance

Now, we Parsis have gone through very difficult times. There were times when we had to seek our safety, we had to go into seclusion, we had to protect ourselves against the depredations of others who were not tolerant and who thought that their religion we had to protect ourselves against the depredations of others who were not tolerant and who thought that their religion was the only religion worth pursuing. So in order to protect ourselves we evolved some customs. Those customs today survive after the need for such protection is over. Those indignities which our temples and our dead suffered are no longer possible because we are living in a more stable world where there is law and order. But the customs which were built up at a time when there was no law and order and no protection still continue. There is no harm in continuing them if you want to. But the question is, should you regard them as such customs that, if another co-religionists say that he begs to differ, you are entitled to tell him that he is not a true Zoroastrian? These are questions to which each one of us has to apply his mind.

Magnitude of our Problems and colossal waste of time and energy on Trivialities

I will pronounce no opinion, I will enter into no controversy. I only want to point out that the problems facing our community are so vast, the poverty is so great, the task of educating our younger generation is so immense, that if our time and energies are frittered away in useless controversies, no time and energy would be left, for the problems and tasks of the day. Just consider: As I read in the papers, we are in India about 91,000 in all according to a reasonable estimate. Now these 91,000 have 8 working hours a day if you work for 10 or 11 hours which is not done by everyone, even then it means just a million man-hours a day. These million man-hours we can put to good use or to no use, we can spend them on trivialities or on worthwhile things. The energy of the community is nothing but the sum total of the energies of all the members of the community. The community has no strength other than the strength of its individual members; and we are so small in number that we cannot

afford to waste our energies on things which are really, not of the essence of our religion and things which can do no good to the community, whichever way the controversy is decided. Just pick up any four or five controversies that come to your mind. How does the future of the community get improved or get worsened whether controversy is decided one way or the other? **The human mind is polemical, and we Zoroastrians are—you may take it as a compliment or otherwise—polemical.** We like to have a controversy. But I would like to see the day when the controversy is over something worthwhile. **Let us quarrel over things which are really of some importance to our future. Let us quarrel about future economic plans. Let us quarrel about how to use our trust funds to the maximum possible benefit of our community.**

Prophet's Humility and Arrogance of Others

I was talking about this doctrine of tolerance which our Prophet taught, and I hope none of our will ever forget that sentence in the Gathas which I have already cited: **"Let each man choose his creed with that freedom of choice which each must have at great events."** If the Prophet, with his inspired divine message, could be so humble, who are we, his followers, to thing that what we believe is right and nothing else can ever be right? None of us is divinely inspired as Zoroaster was. Nor do we know enough. And truth is so difficult to come by. Whatever field of human activity you may apply your mind to, truth is the most difficult thing to come by. There is a famous passage in Bernard Shaw's play 'Major Barbara' where the son scolds the father for certain conduct, and the son says, 'Father, I totally disapprove of what you have done; you are totally wrong.' The father replies, 'My son, you must be the cleverest philosopher who ever lived, because if you know what is right and what is wrong, you have solved the problem which has baffled all the philosophers of all the ages.' **While each one of us has to form his judgment, none of us, and literally none of us, is entitled to believe that he has come to the ultimate truth.**

Our Religion should get More Widely Spread

Some of the customs that you follow today, if you trace back in history, were totally unknown in the times of Zoroaster. I think so highly of our religion that my personal belief

is that this religion should get more widely spread and more widely known. Just consider **how Zoroaster himself could have established his religion unless he had converts to his own point of view? We are not all born from Zoroaster. He was not the fore-father of every one of us. That means that for a period there was conversion.** Now, when did it happen that the right or the possibility of conversion was denied as a matter of our creed? These are questions to which we have to apply our mind. I want you to think for yourselves before you come to any definite conclusion on a vital issue on which the entire future of the community depends.

Alarming fall in our numbers

I am very sad to find that the numbers of the community are diminishing. Whether the future for us will be as good as the last 200 years have been for the Parsis, is again a matter of doubt. I am sorry that the doubt should remain. I remember talking with some scholars; one from Australia, one from Germany and one from England. They expressed their belief—and they are great lovers of Zoroaster's religion that our community is dying. "Why do you say it is dying?", was my question; and they gave me some reasons. They may be right, they may be wrong. But we must awake and realize that while we have produced some very fine men in the past, it is not as if a community which has produced great men in the past will also produce good men in the future. Because we produced Dadabhai Naoroji, it does not follow that in the next century we will again have another Dadabhai Naoroji. Nations have been known to perish. Some generations have been known to do outstanding work, and then suddenly a dark age. The Romans and the Greeks had fantastic achievements to their credit; and then for 900 years, which are called the Dark Age from the fifth century to the fourteenth century—nothing worthwhile was done. These were the civilizations having millions of active participants. We are only 91,000. It takes a long time to kill a nation of a hundred million participants. We are only 91,000. It takes a long time to kill a nation of a hundred million. It takes very little time to break a community which has only a hundred thousand as its members.

Open discussion Absolutely Essential

The problems facing us are problems which affect the entire future of the community. How do we set about solving these problems? My humble recommendation to my co-religionists is, please have a free discussion. Do not try to burke or stop, stifle or suffocate any discussion. **Truth will emerge from a free debate. An open discussion is absolutely essential if you want to come ultimately to the correct conclusion and I would plead to my friends to let the truth prevail.** Now, who is afraid of a free discussion? only the man who is not on the side of truth. Let me give you an example in the political sphere. Have you heard of a democracy which is frightened of, say, communism? No, communism can be openly practised, where there is freedom of discussion. On the other hand in communist countries, dissent is not permitted, because they know that if the truth were to be revealed, the people will get enlightened and the totalitarian regime would come down. Thus, a communist country will not permit free discussion of ideas; while a democratic country will permit it. **Our religion is so great, and it is so wholly founded on truth that it will always bear scrutiny and discussion. Never be frightened of a discussion resulting in anything detrimental to truth.** Discussion has never resulted in the death of truth. It has always resulted in the truth getting fortified as a result of different points of view being discussed.

Twofold Problem Facing the Community

The problem which is facing the community is, to my mind, twofold in the years ahead. (I repeat, I say all this because I am so deeply involved in the future of this community to which I have the privilege to belong.) The two problems are: first, how shall we **keep alive this great faith of ours and see that it continues to influence human conduct for countless generations to come;** and secondly, how shall we **improve the economic condition of our community.** I myself do not share the view that this religion is destined to die. I believe it will survive for centuries to come. It is perhaps **the oldest religion in the world, and will perhaps survive till the end of the world.** But we have a tremendous responsibility at this juncture today. In the past it was all right: popula-

tions were small and the struggle for existence was not so fierce.

Farsighted Forefathers — Our lack of Economic Foresight

Our forefathers were so farsighted that they bought the whole of Malabar Hill and made investments which look today almost incredible. Look at what Jamshedji Tata did. What a farsighted man! Whole townships were bought over, whole villages, whole tracts of land. The man who bought them then, knew that a hundred years later they would have tremendous value.

Now, this economic foresight is what we are lacking at the present moment. We have to regulate our community's affairs in such a way that we see what a hundred years later the requirements of the community will be. We must have that foresight. We must have that vision. If we were to divert our attention from unnecessary quarrels and concentrate on things which are calculated to improve the welfare of the community, we shall have done a good job for our own people.

Old Methods Won't Do

I know that the trustees of the Parsi Puchayets in different towns are honestly devoted to the same end, viz, the welfare of our community. But the question which I am posing for your consideration is—should we not try to **find out new ways in which the community's economic problems can be solved?** This is an age in which **the old systems will not work any more.** Fifty years ago a business could be run on the basis of dynastic succession. This is the age of the technocrat. This is the age when expert knowledge has to be brought to bear on the subject. For example, in the eighteenth century you had apothecaries who were physicians and barbers who were surgeons. And this was so in the 'advanced' countries of Europe! In fact, when Dr. Johnson or Boswell was unwell, an apothecary gave the medicine. In the age Dr. Aspi Goralwala you do not expect that kind of medical treatment to be meted out to the citizens. You see how the World has changed. You can no longer rely upon the old methodology. **You have to employ the new techniques of economic development, growth and progress.** And our community has brains enough and has adequate capacity.

Time our Enemy

The Trustees of the Parsi Punchayet and the other Trustees have taken the trouble to come from different parts of the country. I am deeply indebted to them all. I know that they are all sincere and well-meaning people, and if I have in my humble way tried to present some point of view, it is in the hope that we shall all collectively make a decision that hereafter we shall concentrate our energies only on worthwhile problems. A mother once asked Dr. Johnson whether her child should be taught mathematics first or history first. Dr. Johnson's answer was, Madam, by the time you have made the decision, another child will have learned both the subjects. Before we decide whether we shall give priority to one scheme or another some other community will have gone places. **We are running against time. Time is our main enemy.** During the last 20 or 30 years, I think, economically we are not progressing, but we are going backwards. So my appeal to you all is, please let us collectively show ourselves to be a wise, tolerant community, with sense of values.

Tributes to Old Teachers

I am so happy to see my old teachers Mr. Rattanshaw Mithaiwala and Mr. Tehmurasp Sarkari. You may find it hard to believe, looking at my physique, that Mr. Tehmurasp Sarkari was once my teacher. But, I serve as a warning as to what would happen if you do not follow his physical culture techniques!

May I in the end thank the Bombay Trustees for their munificence and for their deep generosity, thank the Trustees of different Anjumans from outside Bombay who have taken the trouble to be here and to grace this occasion, thank all the other organizations which have come to Bombay from different parts of India, and thank you all, ladies and gentlemen, for having done me this signal honour. When I am in the United States, I shall relive the memories of your warmth, your friendship and your deep affection, and that will be a source of great happiness to me in the days when I am 12,000 miles away from this beloved city of mine.